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The Call to Follow Jesus

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Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Luke 5:1-11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Most scholars recognize Jesus' baptism as the beginning of his ministry. And as we read in our text today, after he was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him—resting on him. That means it came to settle upon him.

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased."

Right at the outset here today, I want you to notice something. I want you to notice that Jesus begins his ministry receiving affirmation from Almighty God, from his heavenly Father. A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son." This is his Father. This is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Triune God.

And as Jesus is here on the earth in the form of a man, facing the challenges of life here on the earth, God affirms him. God the Father affirms him and then anoints him—anoints him. The Spirit of God settles upon him and takes rest upon him for his life.

And so we can say this about Jesus' life: He was not living for the approval of his Father's love; he was living from an assurance—an inspiration—of his Father's love. The love of his Father was compelling him, moving him, strengthening him in his life. He wasn't living for God's approval as his Son, but from his approval—from his love.

And this makes all the difference, friends.

Christian speaker Ed McGlasson writes in his book *The Difference Fathers Make*:

He writes this:

"While speaking recently to a group of football players at a local high school, I asked one of the young athletes, 'When you're on the field, do you ever look up into the stands?'

"'Yes,' he responded.

"I asked him, 'What are you looking for and why?'

"'I look for my dad,' he said. 'I'm looking to see whether or not he's smiling.'

"'What does that feel like, to see him smiling over you?' I asked him.

"'There's nothing in my life that means more to me than what my dad thinks of me,' he said. 'When my dad is there watching, there's nothing I can't do.'"

It continues:

"While playing in his city baseball championship, my 11-year-old son, Luke, struck out at his first at-bat in the game. He put his head down and sulked as he walked back to the dugout, looking for my reaction.

"He peeked out from underneath his cap, glancing in my direction. I raised my arms in victory and shouted, 'You are a champion, son! You are going to blast the next one!'

"His countenance changed from a frown to a smile.

"In his next at-bat, he smacked the first pitch against the center field fence. As he rounded second base, he raised his hands and gave me the victory sign.

"He caught my smile over his life, and his face reflected the love that I have for him."

Friend, I want you to know today that Jesus came into the world and received the love of a Father—the Heavenly Father—who is sovereign over the entire universe because he was perfect and right. But he came to pay the penalty for your and my imperfections so that you and I might receive the same affirmation from God—this same anointing from God.

See, Jesus came into the world to do for you and me what we couldn't do for ourselves, and that is to pay this penalty for our rebellions against God so that we could be accepted by God and brought into his love.

And so, friend, if you're listening today, I want you to understand this: Jesus is not the only one whom God is smiling over. If you have received Christ into your life and your sins have been forgiven, you stand pure and holy and perfect before God in the righteousness of Jesus.

The Bible tells us that God is smiling over you. He really is. He affirms who you are. He is pleased with who you are because Jesus has taken away all your sin.

Just as Jesus experienced the love of Almighty God and the anointing of God, so now, through Christ, you and I come into the love of God.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have acceptance by God—only because the blood covers our sin, the shed blood of Jesus.

And then the gospel writer John says this: "You have an anointing. The Holy Spirit has come upon you."

If you're listening here today and you know Jesus as your Savior and Lord, I want to remind you: You are secure in the love of a Father. He smiles upon you. He's cheering you on. And he has anointed you with his Spirit to do what he's sent you into the world to do—to quicken you, to empower you, to strengthen you, to correct you, to instruct you, to train you in righteousness.

And so this is what's happening with Jesus. It is what happens to a person when they come into Christ. After his baptism, they receive the love of God through the forgiveness of Christ. And then, the anointing of the Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance for all eternity as one of God's children.

And so, that's what we learn at the start of Jesus' ministry—what it means to be in God's family, to be received and accepted and smiled on by God as one of his children, in whom he is well pleased. And then, to be anointed by God, by His Holy Spirit, to empower us to do the things he's prepared in advance for us to do.

So let me just remind you today, friend: if you know Christ, you are affirmed by God. He's smiling on you, and you are anointed by him.

But if you don't know him, friend, why not today? Open your heart to Jesus. God sent him into the world. "For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but be forgiven, be made right with God, and have everlasting life with God."

And then, Jesus, in his life, moved from there into his ministry. Now, he was first tempted for 40 days, tried in the desert—in the wilderness—by the evil one. And then he comes out and starts to teach in the synagogues, travel, and share about the kingdom of heaven and God's revelation of who he is.

And he said, "The kingdom of God now is near us."

He's ushering it into us, and we can receive it, and we can be a part of it. And then he starts to call people to follow him—not just to be accepted by God in his love and then anointed by him, but then he calls us to be his disciples, to walk in his footsteps, to let the dust of his sandals get on us as we walk so closely with him that we are known as followers of the Way or followers of Christ.

In the story of the Bible, we see that Jesus came to bring salvation—this affirmation from God, this acceptance from God for all eternity, and this anointing from God—first for the Jews, who are God's chosen people.

We've looked at the Old Testament, all through the Old Testament, and then now, open to the Gentiles—the entire world. This is a universal opportunity for anyone in the world to come to Jesus and find salvation in their lives. And he starts to call people to himself.

So here's what we read in Luke's Gospel:

He was one day teaching alongside the Lake of Galilee. The people were crowding around him and listening to the Word of God because they'd never heard anyone speak like this.

He saw at the water's edge two boats left there by fishermen. So this was their work, their profession, and these were some of the tools of their profession—two boats. And they were washing their nets—more of their tools for their profession.

Now, it says Jesus got into one of the boats.

Now, I don't know if you've ever been sitting at your desk and someone comes and gets at your desk, or you're on your farm and someone climbs in your tractor. This is a very unique thing that's happening here.

Jesus gets into these individuals' boat that was sitting there. He got into one of them—the one belonging to Simon, a specific one—and he asked him to put out a little from shore.

So here you have this rabbi, this very popular man who's growing in popularity. He's a spiritual teacher, and the crowds are gathered there. And he gets into a boat and says, "Simon, would you put out to the shore?"

Now, what is Simon supposed to do?

There he is, with all these people watching. So he does this. He sat down there, out a little ways from the shore, and he taught the people from Simon's boat.

The scripture says it was like a natural amplifier of his voice so people could hear him better.

And then it says this:

Now, Jesus is messing with Simon's equipment, Simon's time, and Simon's life. And then, when he'd finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch."

Now, understand, Simon had been out all night fishing. He'd just cleaned his nets. Jesus gets in his boat—his *taking*—he's probably tired after his night's work. Now, he's done some teaching from the boat, and he starts to tell Simon what to do in his profession.

And so you can imagine Simon's reaction. I mean, Simon's not exactly sure what to do here.

Simon answers him and says, "Master..."

So he has some respect for this man, but he says this:

"We've worked hard all night and we haven't caught anything. I'm a fisherman. I kind of know what's going on here. You're trying to tell me my business."

But Simon says this:

"Because you say so..."

You know, you're a rabbi. You're a spiritual leader. And by the way, we're right here in front of this entire crowd, and they're all following you. So it would be a little ridiculous of me to start a fight with you.

"So because you say so, I will let down the nets."

I want you to notice something here, friends.

Jesus reserves the right to meddle in people's lives because of who he is.

This is the Great I Am. This is the one who was, and is, and is to come. And sometimes he starts to meddle in our lives in ways that make us uncomfortable.

He comes into our lives and messes with even our profession, our time, our energy, and even our sleep.

Here, he's messing with Simon's—what would be moving into a time of rest.

But I want you to understand: he's doing this because he loves him.

The Bible says Jesus came among us in love, and so he's messing with Simon's life out of love.

And so he tells him to go cast his nets out farther in the sea.

And so then, the Scripture says, when they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

So now, not only is Jesus messing with Simon's equipment, he's starting to destroy it. The nets are beginning to tear because there are so many fish. So they signaled to their other partners in the other boat, "Come and help us."

And they came, and they filled both boats so full that now, not only are the nets breaking, but the boats are beginning to sink.

Friends, there's so much here.

Here we see the sovereign God. This is Jesus displaying that he is the great I Am. This is him showing that he's Lord over the entirety of creation, even over the fish. This is Jesus showing to these individuals around him that this is no ordinary spiritual leader—that this is the Messiah, that this is the Lord among us.

So here we have this encounter with these individuals, a very personal encounter, messing with their lives in very personal ways. And he's now destroying some of their equipment. Their nets are tearing. Their boats are sinking.

When Simon Peter saw this, it says he fell at Jesus' knees and said to him, "Go away from me, Lord."

No longer calling him "Master," which was a reference of respect for a spiritual leader at that time, now he's calling him Lord—King, Ruler.

He said, "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. I don't understand exactly who you are. I just know I fall way short of who you are."

For he and all his companions, it says, were astonished. They were overwhelmed, awestruck by the catch of fish they had taken.

Jesus is here displaying who he is to these men and now calling them to himself to be followers of him as his first disciples.

They were astonished. Now they're calling him Lord. Peter is, and James and John were. They're the sons of Zebedee.

And while Peter is on his knees, out in that full boat, in the water, bowed down before him, Jesus says to Simon, "Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid."

He's going to lift his soul. He's going to give him grace.

He says, "Don't be afraid. You have spent your life trying to catch fish, but now you will become a fisher of men—a fisher of people."

So the Scripture says these men pulled their boats up onto the shore.

I mean, can you imagine how they had to row these boats in, filled with fish? The biggest catch they'd ever had—overflowing and sinking in. Their nets were tearing, and they're just gritting to pull this boat up.

And they should be exuberant over the biggest catch they've ever had.

They pull their boats up onto the shore, and then it says this: they left everything and followed him.

Followed Jesus.

Why? Because now they knew who he was. Not just—not just a rabbi—but they knew that this was someone special.

This was... this was the Lord.

And they got it. Not that they would always get it, but the epiphany of this day, the revelation of this day, was so clear to them at this point that they left everything—their greatest catch ever—to follow him.

Friends, this is how Jesus started recruiting his team, and he's still doing this today.

He's inviting people to follow him, to come into the love of Almighty God, to receive the anointing of God so that you might be a disciple of Jesus Christ and a follower of him, walking closely after him.

Those who have ears, let them hear.

Father, encourage us by your Word. Encourage us by your love. Strengthen us by your Spirit.

Give us ears to hear, eyes to see what you're saying to us—even in the life of Peter and James and John—and the calling that your Son initiates towards all people to become followers of him.

Followers of the Way. Followers of the King. Followers of the Lord.

Seal this in our hearts. Give us a passion to do this. Work this in us so that we want to live like those early disciples—selling out everything to follow you.

Strengthen us, Father, in this.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.